

9/7/25**Care Deeply — Loving God's Creation*****Isaiah 24:4-13*****Pastor Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Good morning, and welcome to all. And we want to extend a special welcome to any of you who may be guests today, who were invited by someone from BBC to come with them to worship, or to even watch with them online. And thank you so much for being with us and for sharing the gift of your time. We are in the midst of a sermon series called “Leave Something Beautiful Behind”, which is an idea that can motivate us, hopefully, to make wise decisions, wise choices, in different areas of our life, so that when our life is over, we will have left something of value behind us. And, frankly, this was a very tough week in that regard, in our nation.

On September 10, as most of us know, Charlie Kirk, a conservative, political activist and author, who co-founded Turning Point in 2012 and was its Executive Director, was gunned down on a university campus. On the same day, there was a shooting at Evergreen High School in Colorado. Just a couple of weeks ago, on August 27th, a shooting occurred, during Mass for students at Church of the Annunciation in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There have been at least 90 incidents of gunfire on school grounds in the United States in 2025 alone, averaging more than two per week. And just a couple of months ago, on June 14, a masked gunman, disguised as a police officer, murdered Minnesota State Representative Melissa Hortman and her husband, and shot their dog, in a shooting at their home in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. All of these events and deaths should be met with universal condemnation, and with words and actions reflecting a desire and hope for mutual respect, unity, peace, and our common bond as human beings and citizens. And the fact that they aren't is a sad reflection on where we are right now as a nation.

The individuals who committed these crimes didn't leave something beautiful behind. They left something violent, ugly, and reprehensible. And whether — in this most recent case — you knew who Charlie Kirk was or not, whether you agreed with him or not, he spread his ideas with words, and by being willing to engage with, and talk to, and debate with people who disagreed with him. And our theme for today, of caring deeply for God's creation, also must include caring deeply for people, and having enough empathy to see even those we disagree with as human beings deserving of life. I'm

afraid, right now, it's hard to argue that we're currently in the process of leaving something beautiful behind for future generations — whether that's in terms of how we're caring for creation, or how we're caring for one another, at a national or global level.

The prophet Isaiah, in *Isaiah 24*, paints a picture of the earth mourning and withering under human sin, which feels sadly relevant today. Listen to *Isaiah 24*, beginning at verse 4.

“The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left. The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilation has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No longer do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The city of chaos is broken down, every house is shut up so that no one can enter. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city, the gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleanings when the grape harvest is ended” (*Isaiah 24:4-13*).

Will you join me in a brief moment of prayer?

God, as we come before you in worship today, and as we hear from your Word, we come with many different thoughts, reflections, and fears weighing on our hearts, and minds, and spirits. God, we don't want to live in an earth like Isaiah describes, where the inhabitants suffer for their guilt, and there is chaos and desolation. God, help us, before it's too late, to appreciate the gift of life in your creation. Help us to take care of one another and your earth well. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, today, as part of our series, we want to encourage you to think about four things very straightforwardly. First of all, the awesomeness of God's creation. And thank you to all of you who submitted photos. Those of you who were here early enough got to see some beautiful photos of creation that you all submitted — and thanks to Sharon for putting them together. We're going to talk about the fact that God has made us all to be

stewards of this earth. And what happens if we're not good stewards of the earth. And what can one person do?

And we're going to do something a little bit different today. I've invited Ben Gregson, who's our worship liturgist today, a longtime BBC member who serves on our Leadership Council, to join me in sharing today's message. So, we're going to do a little kind of "talk show" back and forth, as we talk through these four different things. And you may wonder, "Well, why did you ask Ben to do this? Why not me?" Well, we probably should start there. Ben is a retired geologist. So, Ben, as we take our seats, why don't you tell us a bit about your background?

Ben: Sure. Yeah, I'm not just the guy that tells bad jokes on Father's Day. I had a career as a geologist. As a kid, I won the kid lottery — I was born in Cape Cod Hospital, and I grew up in Brewster. And I grew up at a time — I call it the "go out and play generation" — when my mom told me that, I had about 100 acres of woods behind my house where I could just go out and play. And I think that had a profound influence on how I saw the world, and what I wanted to do with my life. So, when it came time to go to college, I applied to UMass Lowell, and I majored in Environmental Science, with a Geology focus. I graduated from there, and I went to UMass Amherst and got a master's degree in Geology. I took that degree, and my wife, Nina, and we moved to West Texas, of all places, where I had a job with Exxon, looking for oil in West Texas and New Mexico. So, I have experience in the extraction of fossil fuel part of the environmental world, based on hands-on experience looking for oil in West Texas. After six years or so, we got tired of living in West Texas, big surprise, and we moved back to Massachusetts. And for the past over 30 years of my career, I've been cleaning up other people's messes. I've been employed as a geologist, working on environmental clean-ups of oil spills and hazardous waste sites. For the last 23 years of my career, I worked here at the base on Cape Cod, on the groundwater clean-up there, and the soil clean-up. And so, I have spent my life caring about the environment, and working to make the world a better place after I leave it.

Pastor Doug: Thanks, Ben, for that background. Now, all of us who live on Cape Cod are grateful you spent time cleaning up the base — that's for sure. So we want to talk

about, first of all, the awesomeness of God's creation. And I wonder, where do you particularly find beauty in creation? Do you have some favorite places? Because I'm guessing all of us have some favorite places we like to go, or spend time out in nature, where we feel close to God and where we feel our souls renewed. Where are some of those places for you?

Ben: I'll mention just three of them, briefly, because there are many. One place is the Brewster Flats. And, in particular, I love to go out there in the middle of the night, with my fishing pole, and I'll walk out on the flats. It's sometimes hard to navigate, but if the North Star is out, I can generally figure out where to go, and just to see all the stars and the lights of the cities and towns around the Cape, and as far away as Boston. And sometimes, if you are out there at night, and you just kick the sand — it's full of phosphorescent critters that will glow in the dark when you kick the sand. It'll be like a shower of sparks coming off of your feet as you walk out there. And it's just an awesome place to be. As I mentioned when I began, I took a trip down the Grand Canyon last month. As a geologist, and someone who loves boating, camping, and hiking, I felt it was a no-brainer that I would love to take a raft trip down the Grand Canyon. What I didn't expect was just the intense awesomeness of the experience, and the spiritual nature of it, just to be in that space. Cell phones didn't work, so I was disconnected from the world for two weeks, and every view was just amazing. A little closer to home — and relevant for this time of year — is just to go out and look at the leaves as they change color. And that's something that we can all do. I'm sure many of us enjoy going up north this time of year to see the foliage. And, as far as I know, there's no particular ecological or competitive advantage for the trees to have their leaves turn such brilliant colors in the fall. I consider it just a gift from God.

Pastor Doug: And next Sunday, we're going to have Kyler Barr here. And Kyler Barr is going to be talking about a book by Jonathan Haidt called “The Anxious Generation”. And one of the antidotes that he talks about, in that book, is to put yourself in awe-inspiring situations in nature, just like you've described. And that's why so many of us, whether it's going to the beach, or for a walk in the woods, or going to the mountains, we feel that being so restorative. And you mentioned, early in the service, *Psalms* 8. We

know back in Genesis, in the creation story, that God looked at everything that God had made, and it was very good. God has created a beautiful creation for us to enjoy. And whether that's the vastness of space, one of the things we sang about this morning — “God of wonders beyond our galaxy.” And I love these photos, that many of you may have seen, from the Hubble Telescope. Looking out into deep space, and just thinking how incredibly vast the universe is that God has made. It's so incredible, it's so awe-inspiring, to think we are a teeny, tiny part of all that God has made. And that's described like in *Isaiah 40*, as well. And so God is the God of this vast universe; at the same time, God has created the tiniest creatures. There's a passage in *Proverbs 30* that talks about the wisdom of small creatures, and specifically mentions ants, rock badgers, locusts, and lizards. When we were visiting Nathan and his family in Connecticut, back in July, I was out on a walk with our two-year-old grandson, Caleb, and I was pointing out how there were these ant hills in between the sections of sidewalk. And he kind of looked down. And I was explaining how the ants were building a bigger house under the ground. And we squatted there, and we watched the ants, as they were bringing dirt out, for a couple of minutes. So, it really is awesome when you think, from the smallest little creature to the vastness of the universe, all that God has made.

Ben: Just to mention one more thing about the Hubble Telescope — one of the coolest photos I've seen from that is, back in 1996, the people in charge of the telescope decided to take a picture of a dark spot in the sky where they thought nothing was. It was about — as you hold your hand out — it was about the size of a postage stamp, with no visible stars. And when they took that picture, they found, not only a bunch of stars, but hundreds of other galaxies, in that dark empty space. And so, just to consider that across our entire vision of the sky, how many stars and galaxies must be out there.

Pastor Doug: Years ago, we had a man named Andrew Lang, whose parents attended our church, who was an astrophysicist. And he came and did a presentation. And one of the things he said — he helped work on that telescope — he said, “When you look beyond the limit of your vision, you will see something new.” And that's true, not only in space, but in life. So, we talked about the awesomeness of God's creation. Let's move on to talk about, here we are, on the planet Earth, and God has called us to be stewards of this Earth — what does that mean to you, Ben?

Ben: Well, to me, that means we don't own the Earth. We're just here renting it and taking care of it. I'm thinking about the minor prophet, Joe Walsh, who played with the Eagles — and he had a song called “Life's Been Good to Me So Far”. And Mitch could probably play us the opening riff on that later if we want to hear it. But one of the lines in the song is, “I stay at motels; tear out the walls. I have accountants pay for it all.” And one time, Joe was talking about the backstory of that song, and apparently, Keith Moon, the drummer for The Who, requested a play date with Joe Walsh. They ended up in a motel room or hotel room, and they decided that they wanted adjoining rooms, so they acquired a chainsaw, somehow, and opened up the wall between the two rooms. I just mention that story as an illustration of what not to do to be a steward of God's world. They did that without any regard for who owned the hotel, or who was going to stay in that room the next night. And, you know, that can happen to us when we live on the planet. I mean, for example, the practice of mountaintop coal mining — where they strip off the top of the mountain to get to the coal underneath — is great if you are making money on it right now, but if you're the people that have to live with the consequences of that type of mining afterwards, it's not such a great thing. And with all fossil fuels, once they're used, they're gone. So, we need to be careful about making decisions on how we extract them and use them.

Pastor Doug: And this image of being a steward, or being a manager, is a very Biblical image that Jesus uses in a number of his parables and his stories. Many of us know the Parable of the Talents, from *Matthew 25*, where a master gives five talents to one servant, and two talents to another, and one talent to a third servant, and tells them to manage them. And then the master goes away on a long journey. And, in many ways, that's a metaphor for our life — that God is entrusting something to us, for a time. And then the master returns, and each of the servants has to give an account for how they have managed what they were given. And there are consequences, both positively and negatively, depending on how good a steward each of those servants was. And there are consequences to our stewardship of the Earth, both for ourselves and for our children, and grandchildren, and future generations. And we talked about the seventh generation concept. Do you want to share that briefly?

Ben: Yeah. That was a concept that many Native American tribes live by, when a major decision on how they were to proceed, or what they were to do, or how they would deal with the Earth, was considered in the framework of seven generations. They considered what impact this would have, not only to the people that lived with them then, but to seven generations down the line.

Pastor Doug: Yeah, because we don't want our descendants cursing us for the decisions that we made in our life. We would like our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren, to be grateful for the decisions and the choices that we've made, and the impact they have, not only on their lives, but at a larger level. So, the awesomeness of God's creation. God calls us to be stewards of all that God has made. What happens if we're not good stewards of the Earth?

Ben: One thing to consider is that human beings have always altered the planet, to some degree. When people started farming crops, they cut down trees, plowed fields, and sustained themselves, based on what they were doing. The problem is, now we have over 8 billion people that need to sustain themselves on the Earth, so with that number, we need to be more careful on how we treat the environment. We have an impact on the Earth. We have an impact on the animals of the Earth, through our stewardship. Some species of animals have done very well — cats, cows, rats, chickens, cockroaches — the populations of those species are robust, compared to what they were in the past. But, unfortunately, populations of other species, wild species, have not fared so well. And, here on Cape Cod, we hear often about the right whales. And, no matter what we do to try to save them, every year, we hear about how their numbers are decreasing. Cape Cod was named, back in the 1600s, because the cod around Cape Cod was so plentiful, you could almost walk across them, there were so many in the water. But, nowadays, it's rare to catch a cod fish. The last one I caught was about 30 years ago. So, the cod have been depleted. Lobsters are moving north because it's just a little too warm for them down here, so they're moving north from New England up into Canada. So, we have impacts on the Earth, based on how we choose to live here.

Pastor Doug: And one of the things that always staggers me is, some of you may have heard of, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch — if you haven't heard of that, here's the photo. It's about twice the size of Texas. Try to imagine that. Three times the size of the nation of France is this floating thing of garbage. It's like plastic soup. Most of it is plastic debris that is just spread across the ocean surface. And the problem is, everything we make, everything we use, everything we eventually throw away, it goes somewhere. It either goes in the air, it goes in the water, or it goes in the ground.

Ben: We think of throwing stuff away, but we don't really think about where “away” is, and nothing disappears. As Doug mentioned, it's got to go somewhere. For a long time, Brewster had a dump, and we just threw everything on the land surface at the Brewster dump. We decided it might be better if we burned stuff. I guess it's better, but not ideal. So, we send our trash, now, to the SEMASS incinerator. It can also end up in the water, like the Pacific gyre. It's got to go somewhere. A lot of the problem is just our desire to have so much stuff. You may have seen, on the news last week, at the port of Long Beach, there were shipping cargo ships, container ships, and the containers were falling off of them. And those ships come into port every day. And when I was in Flagstaff, on the trip, there were trains after trains of containers going east, with stuff from the port of Long Beach, heading to a store near you, so you can buy another T-shirt and a pair of sneakers. And once you're done with those things, they gotta go somewhere.

Pastor Doug: So what can one person do, Ben, in the wake of everything we're talking about? One of my thoughts, first of all, is that we can all work to help create beauty. And some of you enjoy doing that at your home. You have a garden, for example, and you enjoy working in your yard. And, here at the church, I want to thank our Meditation Garden volunteers: Sarah Kemp, Jan Cerasale, Ian Millen, Susie Sellitto, Ellen Meyer, Sue McDormand, George Haller; our mowing team, which is Don Holm, George Vermiglia, Wayne Johnston, and Chris Conkling; and our hedge trimming and mulching team, which is Jerry Cerasale, Mark Strum, Jason Lussier, and Nathan Carr. All these people volunteer and work here at our church to help make this a place of beauty. Because we worship a good and beautiful God, and we want even our grounds to reflect that, and to help inspire that. And we've heard from *Psalm 104*, *Psalm 8*, and also

Isaiah 24, and how they contrast God's life-giving spirit with human destruction. So, Ben, what are some practices that can help us live more in tune with God's care for creation rather than contributing to its harm?

Ben: One thing we can think of, and do, is to live like our parents and grandparents did. My mom, bless her heart, did not have a clothes dryer until I was in high school. So, every day, all the laundry went out on the line — summer, winter, throughout the year. My parents were in their twenties during the Great Depression, and were a generation that ended up going to World War II, and in that time, there was a saying that went, “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” That was a time of shortage, and people tried their best to make use of what they had. There's the slogan, “Reduce, reuse, recycle.” Reduce is really the most important part of that, you know, use what you have. Try not to buy so much stuff. Reuse it — my grandfather was the king of making new stuff out of something else. And the last part of that is recycle, which should really be a last resort — you know, if you can't do something with what you have now, then it's time to recycle it. But there's all sorts of little things that we can do, and you've got to realize that little things mean a lot and add up. Try to reduce the use of single-use plastics. You have choices when you go to the grocery store — you can buy ketchup in the good old glass bottle, like we all used to use, as opposed to the plastic bottle — and glass recycles better. Be aware of where the things you buy come from. Think of those shipping containers that have to come from Asia to bring your stuff to you. And try to buy things that are made locally, grown locally. When we were kids, nobody had blueberries in January. So, don't buy blueberries in January — buy frozen ones from Maine that only come from a few hundred miles away versus ones from Peru that come during the wintertime.

Pastor Doug: And even here on the Cape, there are stores — in Dennis, The Glass Store; there are farmers markets — and, you know, basically, for your own health and well-being, the closer something is grown or comes from, probably the better off you are. Well, I want to thank you, Ben, for being with us today. Do you have any closing words before I wrap this up?

Ben: Sure. Just consider the impact of what you do on the environment. I think the most important thing is just to be aware, so you can make informed choices, and live on the earth like you're renting it from God and you're trying to make sure to do your best to get your security deposit back when the lease is up.

Pastor Doug: That's great, Ben. Well, as we've shared, the earth, and all that live in it, has been created by God. It's filled with beauty, it can inspire us to awe, and we are called, as Ben just said, to steward creation well, as belonging to God and to future generations — and if we fail to be good stewards, it's our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren who are going to suffer and deal with the consequences of our selfishness and short-sightedness. So, we can live simply, as has been said, so others may simply live, and each of us, through the choices we make, can make a difference.

Let's pray.

God, we thank you that you are the Creator of the universe, the Creator of the world and all that live in it, and the Creator and the giver of each of our lives. God, help us to appreciate the sacredness of life, and even in these divisive and difficult times in which we live, God, deliver us from evil. Deliver us from demonizing our fellow citizens and human beings just because we may not agree on 100% of things. God, help us to see Christ in every other person. Help us to think not just of ourselves, but of our children and grandchildren in the future. We thank you that you are our Creator, and we recognize that we are humbly dependent upon you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. *Psalms 104* describes God's wisdom in creating and sustaining all living things. How does this Psalm shape your understanding of God's ongoing involvement in creation?
2. The psalmist marvels at the variety and abundance of life. What part of creation most helps you experience awe, wonder, or gratitude toward God?
3. *Isaiah 24* paints a picture of the earth mourning and withering under human sin. In what ways do you see this reality in our world today?
4. Both *Psalms 104* and *Isaiah 24* contrast God's life-giving Spirit with human destruction. What practices can help us live more in tune with God's care for creation, rather than contributing to its harm?
5. *Psalms 104* emphasizes dependence — creatures look to God for food and breath. How does recognizing our dependence on God change the way we treat the earth and its resources?
6. *Isaiah 24* highlights how human choices impact not just people, but the whole earth. How might caring deeply for creation also be an act of love toward our neighbors? How might we join God in that renewing work?